

T E N N E S S E E F O L K L O R E S O C I E T Y

B U L L E T I N

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NUMBER 1

A MOUNTAINEER LOOKS AT HIS OWN SPEECH

One of the least significant, perhaps, but one of the most characteristic, certainly, of the indications of American romanticism is the attitude of Americans in general toward the manners or lack of them which belong to their compatriots the Allegheny mountaineers.

My purpose in this little paper is no more than to organize my own ideas on the language I have heard, and spoken, most of my life. I hope there is little in it which can be called prejudice, although I have nothing but sympathy for the old patriarch who spoke as follows, sitting on the front step of his cabin:

"I may be a-gittin' purty fur along in years, boys, and they say us old folks kinda gits funny idees, but I'll be derned if them northern fellers don't fairly wear a body out the way they nose about and ax all kinds of fool questions, like wus I ever in a feud and what kind o' games we played when we wus young'ins, and do I believe the world is round and all sich junk as that..... I'm plum wore out a-answerin' 'em. Sometimes it gits so I jist make up a lot of stuff and tell it to 'em like it was gospel truth and they swaller it, hook, line, and sinker. I guess hit's a sin and I hadn't ort to do it, because they don't mean no harm. The'r jist sorta studyin' us, ye know, boys, because us mountain folks we ain't like nobody they ever seed afore. But I'm tellin'

ye right now they ain't like no critters I ever seed afore nother."

.....

Popular belief to the contrary, the mountaineers of the Smoky Mountain section of the Alleghenies are not predominantly Anglo-Saxon. The basis of the race, and they are a race if more than two hundred years of exclusiveness can make them so, is Anglo-Saxon. But the blood of the Germans, the Irish, the Welsh, the Scotch, the French, and the Netherlands accounts for considerably more than half their racial stock.

However, the language which this mixed race speaks and hears is almost completely Saxon. A Yorkshire farmer would have little difficulty understanding a colleague from the slopes of the Sugarlands, and hoary grammatical forms like afearred, afore, hearn, are common property in the mountains.

The French and Latin element in English evidently made little impression on the Scotch-Irish progenitors of the Smoky Mountaineers. Occasionally we are assailed with such a word as dilitary (dilatory), and any Latin forms which may be found in the King James version of the Bible are favorites of the older mountaineers, but such words are shoved far into the background by more vivid and picturesque terms, with their roots in Old English. There are few words so characteristic as beatin'est and workin'est, which in politer so-

ciety would be strangest and most industrious. I need hazard no opinion as to which are the more expressive.

It would seem, on the face of things, that the great number of French Huguenots and "Pennsylvania Dutch" who succeeded the Cherokees in the Smokies would leave their imprint on the dialect. That they did not is evidence of the greater virility of the Saxon tongue or of the fact that the Scotch-Irish, one of the most truculent peoples of all time, showed their hatred of things furrin by refusing to accept anything from the "Dutchmen" and the "Frenchies". The German word kraut survived, for the obvious reason that there was no equivalent in the technical vocabulary of the Scotch-Irish housewife. French derivatives are more numerous, but as to what extent that is due to extensive reading of the Bible I am not prepared to say. Certainly French influence survives where it would be most expected, in the word sash-i-ate, which is a call in a dance. The mountaineer also speaks of "sashayin' around".

There are certain peculiarities of enunciation which it might be well to speak of here. For the Smoky Mountaineer the nose is as much an organ of speech as the larynx. This is particularly noticeable in old people, and may be because of the catarrh brought on by constant exposure and diseased tonsils. The mountaineer drawls to an alarming extent, even more so than his neighbors of the plantations. His voice is utterly without cadence, almost a droning monotone. On the

other hand, it has a deep, resonant quality which catarrh and embarrassment never wholly obliterate. It still makes me wonder to hear one particular lean and leathery and hawk-beaked old dweller of the forests talk. I have known him for years. But he speaks with such a slow, soft, sweet sonorousness that I forget his reputation, his habits, and his quid. There are many such as he, men and women whose voices are those of unhurried angels. Nowhere have I heard such voices save in the mountains. Plaintive, melancholy, sometimes nasal and whining to be sure, but voices which produce an insistent nostalgia when you have tired of the loose mumbling of the deep south, of the clipped sourness of the east, or of the twang like an old guitar out of tune of the Westerner.

In contrast to this softness of tone, the explosive Teutonic effect is sometimes gained for particular words by adding consonants where they do not belong. For example, a final t is sometimes added to words ending in the sound of s -- cf. twicet, oncet. Wish is usually wisht or wusht. Barnd is said for barn, borned for born, brand for bran, and shoald for shoal.

The Scotch r is very much in evidence. A mountaineer says bur-rrd, and never bu'd, for bird. As in New England, the r sound is often added to words ending in a vowel, particularly in idiomatic uses of the preposition to -- userter (used to), hafter (have to).

One very noticeable sound which, so far as I know, is peculiar to the mountaineers and their sons in Texas, Arkan-

sas, and California, is the pronunciation of v, b, and p before m and n. It reminds the listener of nothing less than the redskin's um, the subject of so much exploitation by comedians and cartoonists. A common exclamation in parts of the hills is Heb'ms! for Heavens! Leb'm is always said for eleven, and seb'm for seven. Sump'm for something is standard.

After k and g the consonantal y is generally inserted. This is seldom noticed by a southerner, because it is common all over the south. It is not so common in the mountains as is supposed. Only a few mountaineers say cvar for car and gyarden for garden, but it would be an impossibility for most of them to pronounce cow any other way than cyow, or care any other way than kyeer or kyer.

The American tendency to use the glide after all vowels is exaggerated in the Smokies. In some cases it almost becomes ludicrous. The pronunciation of after sounds like eye-ut-er or eye-ee-ut-er or ay-ee-ut-er (accent on first syllable). Whether this is a result of the tendency to drawl or the drawl is a result of this tendency is not a question I wish to discuss here.

The standard American vowels can hardly be recognized. Nor can I find any rules or even generalities to illustrate this. The vowel sounds are simply mixed up. Thus, we hear b'ar for bear, air for our, lar for liar, wuss for worse, lootle for little, chehr for chair, cyore for cure, soush for sauce, beca'se for because, and saissy for saucy. The

only vowels we can be reasonably sure of are the so-called "long and short i's", and the diphthong oi. The first is never given the diphthongized sound, but seems to be nearer the much-disputed "intermediate a" sound. To a northerner it sounds as if the mountaineer is saying rat or rot for right, whereas in reality he is uttering a sound half-way between the two, a sound which without the glide would be immediately recognized for exactly the same sound as a "Spanish a" or a French "close a". The short sound of i is pronounced in any of three ways, as ei (eh-ee), as ay (long a), or as ai ("short a" with a glide). The other vowel sound we can be reasonably sure of, the diphthong oi, is generally pronounced as in p'inted, h'isted, j'ined, for pointed, hoisted, joined.

In regard to grammar, very little need be said. It is simply illiterate grammar. The double negative is so prevalent that anything else sounds affected. The singular form of the noun is used after numerals, as seven year, twenty head, four gallon, etc. The prefix a- is always used before the present participle, as a-huntin', a-cryin', etc. The "indirect object, in the form of the old "Petrified Dative" is used excessively, as in "I'll git me a book", "He bought him some shoes". Never is always used in the negative preterite (cf. "I never seed him" for "I didn't see him"). Auxiliary verbs are often omitted in compound tenses, as in "I don hit", "I been over thar".

It must be realized that the speech of the mountaineer varies from one district to another. Thus, to give specific

examples, the old families in Cades Cove -- now in the Smoky Mountain National Park -- wherever they may have been scattered by an impersonal government, use a glottal catch between their words like the Germans and Norwegians. I have noticed this also in a few families of Wear's Valley, in Sevier County. The people of Happy Valley on the Little Tennessee use "Heb'ms!" almost universally as an exclamation of surprise. They also say come-it for come here. The people of Tuckaleechee Cove, only eight miles away as the crow flies, never use either of these expressions. And the game called "Hoopie-Hide" in Tuckaleechee is just plain "Hide-and-Seek" in Happy Valley.

Another interesting fact which should be noted is that all members of a family usually talk with the same intonations, the same vowel sounds, and the same expressions for three or four generations. In numerous families the strongest feature of resemblance between the respective members is their peculiar manner of speaking. I could mention fourteen descendants of one man, still alive, who use the same deliberate, hesitant drawl. The full importance of this tendency in these mountains, where family ties are perhaps stronger than in any other part of our land, cannot be appreciated until you look for it, and verify it with your own ears.

Such, in general, is the speech of the mountaineer of the great Smokies, at least from the Little Tennessee River northward to the French Broad. It seems to me that his speech has been more often distorted by authors who should

know better than has that of the Scotch. It is a strong speech, a virile speech, with an intonation like that of no other tongue, a speech which cannot be accurately transcribed, even by the International Phonetic Alphabet. It causes spasms of laughter when a northerner first hears it with its full flavor, and the young people of the mountains, cursed by tourists, high schools, and the radios, are becoming ashamed of it. They do not realize that it is a symbol of their fathers -- slow, deliberate, queer, and yet charged with the dynamic virility that made America.

--Ralph S. Walker

SPECIMENS OF MOUNTAIN SPEECH
(Noted and transcribed by Mr. Walker)

Hit's allus beat me why they don't put somebody in them
hit z ɔ: ləs bi:t mi: mæ ʒeɪ doʊnt put sɑmbɑ:di in ðəm
towers who'd know as whut they 'us put there fur. Hit's a
tɑnz hu:d nɔ: æz mɑ: tre: əz put te: r fər. hit z ə
shame what them C. C. boys don't know about the woods. Hyer'
ʃe: m mɑt tæm sɪ: sɪ: bɔɪz doʊnt nɔ: əbɑʊt ðə wu:dz. hyər
they got a man up hyer' on Look Rock, a puhfect stranger, to
ðə gɑ:tə mæn ʌp hyər dɪn luk Rɒk, ə pʊfɪk streɪndʒər, tə
tell us old hands whor to go when they's a far to be fit.
tel ʌs ɔ:l hændz mɔ: tə go: mæn ðe: zə fɑ: tə bi: fit.

Hit ain't right, I tell ye. Hyer's Jerry, an' Jeff, an'
hit eɪn't raɪt, ɪ tel jɪ: hyər z dʒəri, æn dʒɛf, æn
me.-- we all know the woods, we k'n tell to a T whur a far
mi: wə: ɔ:l nɔ: ðə wu:dz, wi: kæn tel tə ə ti: mɑ: rə fɑ: r
is. We've traimped all over these hyer' mountains sence we
iz. wi: v træɪmpd ɔ:l ɔ:vər ði: z hyər maʊntənz sɛns wi:

was big enough to foller air pabs. We've hunted possums,
 was big ar nat ta fa:lar er pæups. Wi:v hantəd pa:usəmz,
 we've trapped foxes, we've laid out in the woods fer weeks
 wi:v træpəd fə:kzəz, wi:v leɪd aʊt ɪn ðə wʊdz fər wi:kz
 at a time -- all th' way fr'm Jeffrias' Hell to th' Cane.
 tə raʊm - ɔ:l ðə weɪ frəm dʒefrɪz Hɛl tu: ðə keɪn.
 We k'n tell ye. But this feller, why man, th' other day he
 wi: kən tel yɪ. bət ðɪs feʊlər, wə mæn, ðə ʌðər deɪ hi:
 reported a far out on the river when it was back up in th'
 ri: pɔ:rtəd ə fɑ: aʊt ɒn ðə rɪvər mæn ɪt wəz bæk ʌp ɪn ðə
 Big Ridge. Shore beats me. 4
 bɪg rɪdʒ. ʃɔ:ər bi:tz mi:.

Pore folks has pore ways, son. An' big folks has big
 pɔ:ər fəʊkz hæz pɔ:ər weɪz, sən. ən bɪg fəʊkz hæz bɪg
 ways. You may theink they don't look down on ye, but down
 weɪz. ju: me: θeɪnk ðeɪ dɒnt lʊk daʊn ɒn jɪ, bət daʊn
 inside o' theirselves they're a-sayin' that ye ain't nothin'
 ɪnsaɪd ə ðərsɛlvz ðeɪr əseɪn ðə tʃeɪnt nɪθən
 but a ol' dirty hill-billy. They don't kehr nothin' about
 bət ə ɔ:l dɜ:rtɪ hɪl-bɪlɪ. ðeɪ dɒnt keɪr nɪθən əbʊt
 us, they jes' wanta take air pitchers.
 əs, ðeɪ dʒes wəntə teɪk ær pɪtʃəz.

Ye don' look much like yore gran'paw. He was jist a
 jɪ dɒn lʊk mʌʃ laɪk jɔ:ər græn'pæp. hi: wəz jɪst ə
 lootle short man, but he shore was stout. I've seed him
 lʊtl ʃɔ:rtmæn, bət hi: ʃɔ:ər wəz staʊt. əv si:d hɪm
 take a prize-pole an' roll over a rock that they ain't no
 teɪk ə praɪz-pəʊl ən rɔ:l ɔ:vər ə rɒk æt ðeɪnt nɔ:
 other two men in the Valley coulda moved. An' I seed 'im
 ʌðər tu: mɛn ɪn ðə vælɪ kʊdə mu:vəd. ən ə si:d ɪm
 throw a steer oncet an' tie 'im up withouten any be'n. He
 θrə: ə stɪər wɒnst æn tə ɪm ʌp wəðaʊt ənɪ be:n. hi:

done it on a bet. Tom Jenkins bet 'im five dollars 'e couldn'
 dan it a: na bet. to: m dʒi: n kən z bet i: m fəv dɑ: lɑ: r z i kʊd n
 do it, an' he tuck 'im up. Yep, boy, yore gran'paw shore wus
 du: et, æn i: tək i: m ʌp. Jɛp, bɔi, jɔ: r grɑ: pəp ʃɔ: r wɪz
 a man.
 ə mæn

John allus said jis' what 'e thought. Oncet they 'us
 dʒɑ: n ə l ə s sɛd dʒɪs 'mɑ: tɪ θɔ: t. wɒn stɛ: n z
 two Mormon preachers, elders 'ey called themselves, a-comin'
 tu: mɔ: r mən pri: tʃə r z, ɛ l d ə r z e: kɔ: l d ə r s e l v s , ə- k ʌ m ə n
 around an' trying' to convert folks to th' Mormon doctrine,
 ə r ə u n d æ n t r a ɪ n t ə k ə n v ɜ: t f ɔ: k z t ʊ θ ə m ɔ: r m ə n d ɔ: k t r i n ,
 an' they walked into John Adams's yard. He wus a-choppin'
 ə n e: w ɔ: k d i n t ə dʒɑ: n æ d ə m z ə z jɑ: r d. h i: w ə z ə tʃ ɔ: p ə n
 wood, but he allus tried to be friendly, and so he stopped to
 wʊnd, bʌt i: ɔ: l ə s t r aɪ d t ə b i: f r ɛ n d l i, æ n s ɔ: i s t ɔ: p t ə
 listen to whut they had to say. Atter a while when they wus
 l i s ə n t ə m ʊ t t e: h ɛ d t ə s e: i, æ i t ə r ə m ə l m ɑ: n e: i w ə z
 expoundin' this an' that, and' provin' this an' argyin' that,
 ɛ k s p ɔ: u n d ə n θ i s ə n θ æ n t, æ n p r ʊ v i n θ i s æ n ɑ: r g i: ə n θ æ t,
 ol' John jist ast 'em p'int-blank:
 o: l dʒɑ: n dʒɪst æs t ə m p ʌ n t- b l æ ŋ k:

"Be ye whut they call the Mormons?"
 b i y i m ɑ: t t e i k ɔ: u l l ə m ɔ: r m ə n z?

They said they wus.
 θ e: s ɛd θ e i w ɪ z.

"Then I jist hain't got no use fer y'ins." An' he turned
 θ ɛ n ə dʒɪst h e i n t g ɔ: t n ɔ: j ʊ s f ɜ: r y i: n z. æ n h i: t ɜ: n
 around an' went to choppin' wood.
 ə r ə u n d æ n w ɛ n t t ə tʃ ɔ: p ə n w ʊ n d.

Sump'm tol' me thet if I didn't move purty quick I'd be
 s ʌ m p ə m t ɔ: l m e: θ ɛ t ɛ t ə d i d n m ʊ v p ɜ: t i k w i k æ d b i:

purt' nigh drowned. An' so I jumped around an' th' poke
 part na draundad. aen so: a dzampd around aen ~~da~~ po:k
 o' water jist missed me. An' Joe wus a-standin' 'ere,
 a wot:er dzist mist mi: aen dzo: was estaendin' 'er,
 laifin' at me. I wisht he wus in Torment.
 laefan at mi: a wist he waz in torment.

Come right in, mister, come right in! I knowed yore
 kam rat in, mister, kam rat in! a no:d yo:r
 brother -- I knowed him well. They wa'n't no finer men then
 brn~~gar~~ - a no:d him wel. ~~ge~~: wa:nt no fanar min ~~den~~
 yore brother. I said to my woman when Bob Stillwell shot
 yo:r brn~~gar~~. a sed to ma wo:man men stilwel sot
 'im -- "Woman," I says, "this valley's lost one o' hit's
 im - wo:man, a sez, ~~gis~~ vaeuliz lo:st wana hitz
 most upstandin'est men." Come right in.
 most upstaendanst min kam rat in.

They ain't no use to deny it --ah-- bruddern -- the
~~ge~~: e:nt no: jus ta di:na it - a - brndarn - ~~da~~
 spirit of the Lord is in me -- ah -- they ain't no use to
 spnrit av ~~da~~ lo:rd iz in mi: - a: - ~~ge~~: e:nt no: jus ta
 deny hit -- a man that follers the Scripters ain't never
 dana hut - e: maen ~~get~~ fa:lers ~~da~~ skriptarz e:nt' nevr
 gonna be let down. The Lord says, in this hyer' ol' book,
 gona bi let daun. ~~da~~ lo:rd sez, in ~~gis~~ hyer ol' buk,
 that whatsoever ye sow that shall ye also reap -- ah -- and
~~gaet~~ m:dtso:evrji: so: ~~gaet~~ sael ji: o:iso ri:p - d:h - aen
 O, brethern, the reapin' will be sore, the reapin' will be
 do:, br~~earn~~, ~~da~~ ri:pen wil bi: sour, ~~da~~ ri:pen wil bi:
 sore!
 So:r.

--From a sermon.

"Howdy, Jack, how air ye?"

həʊdi, dʒæk, haʊ ɛr yɪ?

"Oh, jist so-so. Hain't feelin' so good to-day fer
O:, dʒɪst so-so: heɪnt fi:ʊlən sə gʊd tədeɪ fər

some reason."

səm ri:zən.

"I'm jist tolable myself. "Hur ye goin'?"

am dʒɪst tələbəl məseɪf mɑ:ɹɪ: goɪn?

"I theink I'll go to the doctor. I theink I got a felon
a θeɪŋk aɪ gəʊ tə ðə dɒktər. a θeɪŋk ə gət ə feɪlən

on my faingger."

ɒn mi feɪŋgə.

"Thet's bad. How's yore wife?"

θetz bæd haʊz jɔ: wəf?

"She's purty porely too. Her rheumatiz is a-botherin'

ʃi:z pɜ:ti pɔ:li tu:. hɜ: ru:mi:tɪz ɪz ə bə:θərɪn

her considerble."

hɜ: kənsɪdərəbəl.

"Did she ever try what I told ye to tell 'er, about
dɪd ʃi: evr traɪ wɒt aɪ təʊd jɪ tə tel 'ɜ:, əbaʊt

makin' a poultice outa slippery ellow, an' nen lettin' hit
meɪkən ə pəʊltɪs əʊtə slɪpri ɛləʊ, æ nen letən hit

set out in th' sun fer a coupla days, an' then tryin' hit
set əʊt ɪn ðə sʌn fər ə kʌplə deɪz, æn θen traɪən hit

on her knée?"

ɒn hɜ: ni:?

"No, she hain't. She ain't been able to find no slip-

nə: ʃi: heɪnt. ʃi: eɪnt bi:n eɪbəl tə faɪnd nə slɪp

pery ellow yit."

əri ɛləʊjɪt.

"They's some on my place. Come over an' git it. Yer

θeɪz sʌm ɒn ma:pleɪs. kʌm əvər æn gɪt ɪt. jɜ:

welcome."

welkəm.

"Thankee, Tom, I'll do thet. Come an' see me."

θæŋki, təm, aɪ dʊ: θet. kʌm ən si: mi.

Cain't go now, I guess. Come an' see me."
Keint go: now, a ges. kam an si: mi:

-A typical conversation.

TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN

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The Southeastern Folklore Society
Meeting

We are privileged to give here the program of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Folklore Society to be held March 31 and April 1 at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Friday, March 31
2:30 P. M.

Welcome: President, James D. Hoskins

Response: Dean Reed Smith, University of South Carolina

Address: Miss Gertrude Knott, Director of National Folk Festival, "Why a National Folk Festival?"

Songs: Mr. Jack Moore, Knoxville

Address: Mr. B. A. Botkin, Folklore Editor, Federal Writers' Project, "Folklore for Whom?"

Spirituals: Knox College Quartet

8:15 P. M.

Lecture: Dr. James Carpenter

Admission: fifty and twenty-five cents

Saturday, April 1

9:30 A. M.

Address: Mr. Ralph Walker, Townsend, Tennessee,

"A Mountaineer Looks at His Own Speech"

Folk Dances: Miss Dorothy Koch, University of Tennessee

Address: Mr. Edwin R. Hunter, Maryville College,

"Studying Proverbs"

Address: Professor George P. Wilson, Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, "Survivals of Early English in North Carolina Dialects"

Folk Dances: Mr. L. L. McDowell

1:00 P. M.

Annual Luncheon: Andrew Johnson Hotel

Ballads: Mr. Buck Fulton

Address:

Business Meeting

The Leading Article

The article on Mountain Speech and the specimens which accompany it in this issue is by Mr. Ralph S. Walker, Principal of the High School at Townsend, at one of the gateways to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. We are glad to have this article for our Bulletin and are particularly pleased to have the careful phonetic transcription from a qualified observer. The editor notes the consistency with which Mr. Walker reports the sound spelled j in such words as Jake and judge as dz rather than as dʒ. Have other observers heard it so?

Bibliography

In the eight issues of the Bulletin which comprise Volumes III and IV we have carried bibliographical notes prepared by Mr. Hill Shine, of Maryville College. These notes taken together represent a careful and comprehensive statement of the recent writings on subjects of folklore interest: folk tales; folk beliefs, customs, etc.; folk songs; and proverbs. This service rendered the Society by Mr. Shine has been of the highest value, and he has our hearty thanks for his careful work.

At least for the present, however, this bibliographical

section will be discontinued, since the same ground is being covered adequately by the bibliographies in the Journal of American Folklore (quarterly bibliographical notes since 1936) and the annual bibliography, prepared by Mr. R. S. Boggs, in the March issue of the Southern Folklore Quarterly (since 1938).